



Transformation of destination leadership networks

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the transformation of a destination leadership network within a new funding and governance landscape for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and destinations in England. Current longitudinal evidence into the transformation of destination leadership networks and emergent Distributed Leadership (DL) in the literature domain of DMOs and destinations is thin. This study adopts a longitudinal case study and ego-network Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach, drawing on the perspectives of the founding and current Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of a DMO coupled with semi-structured expert interviews with policy makers from VisitEngland. Longitudinal data findings provide useful insights into the transformation of DMOs and their wider networks through the enactment of DL in order to cope with change and uncertainty.

1. Introduction

The network literature in the domain of DMOs and destinations has grown exponentially in the last two decades (Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Longjit & Pearce, 2013; Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008; Williams & Hristov, 2018; Zach & Racherla, 2011) amidst a growing recognition among destination organisations of the importance of collaboration in destination leadership and strategic destination decision-making.

Leadership and its distributed dimension, namely Distributed Leadership (DL), has only recently been recognised on the agenda for DMOs and destinations (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016, 2018; Kozak, Volgger, & Pechlaner, 2014; Pechlaner, Kozak, & Volgger, 2014; Valente, Dredge, & Lohmann, 2015). Opportunities are presented by DL with decreased public funding for DMOs. Organisations involved in strategic destination decision making are challenged to identify alternative approaches to pooling resources and expertise (Hristov, 2015; Reinhold et al., 2015).

The reduction of state support for destination and DMOs is not geographically-bound, but instead, it has emerged as a global phenomenon (Hristov & Naumov, 2015; Scott & Marzano, 2015). As a result, governments around the world seek to empower DMOs and other key strategic destination organisations to assume leadership functions and identify alternative, yet sustainable means of funding their operations in times of public to private leadership transition (Reinhold et al.,

2015). This is the case with the UK, where reshaped DMOs face significant changes and uncertainty related to the sustainability of their funding models (Coles, Dinan, & Hutchison, 2014; Hristov & Petrova, 2015). Financially-constrained DMOs have been presented with significant challenges in delivering value to their destinations, visitors and member organisations (Reinhold et al., 2015).

This interdependence of destination organisations calls for the consideration of alternative funding and governance approaches in place of traditional public sector leadership (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Reinhold et al. 2015) and the investigation of opportunities presented by shared forms of leadership, such as DL (Hristov & Zehrer, 2015; Kennedy & Augustyn, 2014; Kozak et al., 2014; Valente et al., 2015).

DL is a recent concept from the mainstream organisational literature (Kozak et al., 2015; Reinhold et al., 2015), which provides a platform for DMOs and other destination organisations to enable the practice of collective and distributed provision of resources in meeting strategic organisational and destination objectives within the changing funding and governance landscape (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017).

The lack of a network-driven, longitudinal perspective into DL and the transformation of destination leadership networks, involved in strategic destination decision-making within a new funding and governance landscape is evident amidst the wealth of recent literature exploring leadership networks in the domain of DMOs and destinations (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017; Kozak et al., 2014; Ness, Aarstad, Haugland, &

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Grønseth, 2014; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). Researchers have predominantly used qualitative methodologies (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Bramwell, 2006; Pavlovich, 2014) in their investigations. Insights from this study may be beneficial to DMOs and destination organisations, both in the UK and internationally, which undergo similar transition calling for the adoption of alternative funding and governance approaches.

Within this context, the overarching purpose of this paper is two-fold:

- (i) To investigate the transformation of a destination leadership network within a new funding and governance landscape for DMOs and destinations in England through the adoption of a network approach; and
- (ii) To provide evidence of how DL is enacted and practiced through communication and resource exchange between strategic member organisations of this destination leadership network.

This study explores the transformation of a destination leadership network within a new funding and governance landscape for DMOs and destinations in England. It provides a longitudinal perspective into a network of key strategic organisations, including a DMO, interested in destination leadership and strategic destination decision-making. A case study approach unfolds the case of Destination Milton Keynes (DMK) and its policy-defined leadership network of key strategic organisations involved in strategic destination decision-making. The case offers a rich account into the enactment and practice of leadership and its distributed dimension in DMO and destination leadership networks within a new funding and governance landscape, with the view to benefit other DMOs and destination networks.

2. Literature review

2.1. Leadership networks in destination and DMO research

Leadership networks stem from the wider organisational literature (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010; Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006) and promote the role of strategic collaboration in delivering both organisational and network outcomes and impact. Leadership networks can be defined as “a network connecting leaders who share common interests and who have a commitment to influencing a field of practice or policy” (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010, p. 601). This can be translated into DMOs and their wider policy-defined leadership networks of organisations having an interest in destinations and involved in destination leadership.

A network of lead destination organisations is able to shape and influence the destination's success, core services, and strategic orientation within a highly saturated market (Koh, 2000; Zehrer, Raich, Siller, & Tschiederer, 2014). Destination networks may well serve as both enablers and influencers in the destination. Destination organisations, which collaborate through networks, are able to scale up their influence and effectiveness, direct destination development and even shape the future of destinations (Balkundi and Kilduff, 2005). Given the importance of leadership networks in such key destination processes, Zehrer et al. (2014) contend that further research is needed to address the opportunities presented by leadership networks in destinations.

The leadership network literature with a focus on destinations has discussed key themes e.g. pooling of destination resources (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017); communication among key stakeholders (Zehrer et al., 2014); evaluation of leadership potential (Zmyslony, 2014); development of leadership research framework (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014); relationships between leadership and power (Blichfeldt, Hird, & Kvistgaard, 2014) among other themes. The literature on leadership networks with a focus on DMOs seen as leadership networks themselves, has discussed the opportunities and challenges for DMOs and their network of member organisations to assume strategic leadership role in destinations (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017; Valente, Dredge, &

Lohmann, 2014). The leadership network literature with a focus on DMOs is still however narrow (Del Chiappa & Presenza, 2013; Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016).

This suggests that whilst the extant literature on DMOs and destinations has incorporated network theory and SNA in the investigation of destination networks (see Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; Nunkoo, Gursoy, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Scott et al., 2008), this has not been the case with leadership and DL in the DMO and destination context (Pechlaner et al., 2014). Arguably, fewer studies to date have investigated how DL is enacted and practiced by key strategic destination leaders using a network approach (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016). In response, the underpinning study attempts to contribute to the narrow literature on DL in the context of DMOs and destinations (see Kozak et al., 2014; Reinhold et al., 2015) by providing a longitudinal perspective into the enactment and practice of DL.

2.2. Longitudinal perspective in leadership networks in destinations and DMOs

A recent study by Zehrer et al. (2014) contends that destination leadership networks evolve over time and can be regarded as dynamic and demanding warranting further investigation (see Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Pavlovich, 2014; Tyler & Dinan, 2001). Leadership networks in destinations have been explored through a longitudinal perspective, particularly in the past decade (Benson and Blackman, 2011; Bramwell, 2006; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Pavlovich, 2003, 2014). Pavlovich (2014) studies 100 years of evolution and transformation of a network of lead destination organisations through an ethnographic investigation which included personal narratives and semi-structured interviews. Adopting a longitudinal case study approach, Bramwell (2006) examines knowledge networks among key destination organisations with the help of qualitative data approach, including discourses in text, including narratives and metaphors. Haven-Tang and Jones (2012) explore a local destination leadership network through the use of secondary data evidence and longitudinal participant engagement. Benson & Blackman (2011) study different forms of distributed leadership in tourism firms in a UK destination, adopting a longitudinal qualitative case study including participant observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis.

An extant review of literature evidences a lack of longitudinal, quantitative network analysis-driven perspectives into the transformation of destination leadership networks (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Pavlovich, 2003). This quantitative longitudinal study explores a DMO and its wider policy network of key strategic organisations within a new funding and governance landscape. A network analysis-driven investigation into this provides ‘helicopter view’ insights into how DMOs and their wider networks respond to change and uncertainty in adapting to a new funding and governance landscape.

In other instances, change and transformation of destination leadership networks has been closely linked to change in the leadership model itself. A recent study by Hristov and Ramkissoon (2016) into destination leadership networks with a focus on DMOs evidences the transition from power relations in destination decision-making and heroic leadership towards a more-collective, DL practiced on a DMO level by a multitude of destination organisations. If heroic leadership is predominantly founded on power relations and public sector-led leadership (Lowney, 2010), DL values the wider opportunities to participation in leadership decisions, distribution of knowledge, expertise and essential developmental resources across the network as a fundamental consideration in light of today's increasingly resource constrained DMOs (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016; Spillane, 2012).

Destination leadership networks experience constant change and are in a state of transition, which is often influenced by shifts in their funding and governance landscape (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017). This presents destination organisations with an array of challenges but also opportunities. DL is a recent paradigm used in destination research as a

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